

## COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation  
July 21, 2011

### DEVIL'S SLIDE COASTAL TRAIL

Project No. 11-017-01  
Project Manager: Timothy Duff

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorize disbursement of up to \$500,000 to the County of San Mateo to purchase and install bathrooms and other access support facilities at the Devil's Slide Coastal Trail and to prepare final plans, specifications, and environmental review and permit documents for a Coastal Trail segment connecting the Devil's Slide Coastal Trail to McNee Ranch State Park and Gray Whale Cove State Beach in northern San Mateo County.

**LOCATION:** Devil's Slide Tunnel, Northern San Mateo County

**PROGRAM CATEGORY:** Public Access

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#### **EXHIBITS**

- Exhibit 1: [Project Location and Aerial Map](#)
  - Exhibit 2: [Caltrans Public Access Plans](#)
  - Exhibit 3: [Green Valley Trail Conceptual Plans](#)
  - Exhibit 4: [Project Letters](#)
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#### **RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:**

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31400 *et. seq.* of the Public Resources Code:

"The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes the disbursement of an amount not to exceed five hundred thousand dollars (\$500,000) to the County of San Mateo ("grantee") to purchase and install bathrooms and other access support facilities at the Devil's Slide Coastal Trail and to prepare final plans, specifications, and environmental review and permit documents for a Coastal Trail segment connecting Devil's Slide to McNee Ranch State Park and Gray Whale Cove State Beach in northern San Mateo County. This authorization is subject to the following conditions:

1. Prior to the disbursement of funds, grantee shall submit for the review and approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy:
  - a. Evidence that the grantee has obtained all necessary permits and approvals necessary to complete the Devils Slide Coastal Trail improvements.

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- b. A final work program, budget, schedule, and names of any contractors to be employed for these tasks.
  - c. A signing plan for the project acknowledging Conservancy participation.
2. Prior to opening the trail to the public, grantee shall prepare and submit for the review and approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy an access management and operation plan that is consistent with all permit conditions.
3. To the extent appropriate, the County shall ensure that the final designs of the project are consistent with the Conservancy's 'Standards and Recommendations for Accessway Location.'

Staff further recommends that the Conservancy adopt the following findings:

"Based on the accompanying staff report and attached exhibits, the State Coastal Conservancy hereby finds that:

1. The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's current Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines.
2. The proposed project is consistent with Chapter 9, sections 31400 *et. seq.* of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding coastal access.
3. The proposed project serves greater than local needs."

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### PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy authorize disbursement of an amount not to exceed five hundred thousand dollars (\$500,000) to the County of San Mateo. Approximately three hundred thousand dollars (\$300,000) will be used to purchase and install bathrooms and other access support facilities at either end of the Devil's Slide segment of the Coastal Trail and two hundred thousand dollars (\$200,000) will be used to prepare final plans, specifications, and environmental review and permit documents for a one-mile segment of the California Coastal Trail ("CCT") that would connect the Devil's Slide CCT segment to McNee Ranch State Park and Gray Whale Cove State Beach to the south (Exhibit 1).

Due to severe and repeated slides and other road failures, the State Department of Transportation (Caltrans) is constructing a tunnel to replace a 1.2-mile stretch of Highway One, referred to as Devil's Slide. The abandoned stretch of highway will become a segment of the CCT when this section of the highway is closed to motor vehicles in 2013. As required by permit conditions for the tunnel project, Caltrans will be constructing four new parking areas and other amenities to serve visitors to the new trail, including bus stops, interpretive and regulatory signs, entry gates, bollards and bike racks (Ex 2). Caltrans will also be constructing pedestrian crossing signs with flashing beacons, in-road lighting and other pedestrian safety features in advance of the crossings where pedestrians cross the highway to access trails, bus stops, and parking areas. Conservancy funds will enable the County to install the additional public access amenities not provided by Caltrans. These include twin-vault waterless bathrooms, drinking fountains, and signage at both

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ends of the Devil's Slide CT segment. Converting Highway One at Devil's Slide into a bicycle and pedestrian facility is identified as a priority in the Coastal Conservancy's "Completing the California Coastal Trail Report." This new public access facility is projected to attract up to 200,000 people within five years of opening.

Conservancy funds will also be used to prepare final plans, specifications and permit documents for a proposed one-mile trail connection from the south tunnel area across a large drainage named "Green Valley" to McNee Ranch State Park and Gray Whale Cove State Beach. All survey documents and other studies required to complete environmental review under CEQA will also be prepared. The trail will be designed to be accessible based on Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) guidelines. In a related effort, Coastal Conservancy staff is also working with Caltrans, the County of San Mateo, City of Pacifica and the National Park Service (NPS) to plan a trail connection from the north tunnel portal trailhead to the south end of Pacifica where it will connect with existing segments of the CCT. When all of these segments are complete, it will result in approximately 7 miles of continuous CCT from Gray Whale Cove State Beach north to the Pacifica Pier.

As conceived in the conceptual plan, a large part of the Green Valley trail project will consist of reconstructing an overgrown primitive trail on Caltrans-owned land on the north side of the Valley, including clearing brush, widening, grading and leveling the trail. In a few areas with steep slopes and loose or unstable soils wood retaining walls will likely be used to stabilize and maintain a minimum trail width. The preferred trail alignment crosses the upper end of the valley where the riparian canopy is the narrowest and will thus minimize impacts to existing woody vegetation. Approximately 600 feet of the trail will involve new trail construction, with an additional 100 feet of elevated boardwalk installed to minimize creek impacts where the trail crosses wetland and willow riparian woodland habitat. Most of the trail is expected to be unsurfaced compacted earth and, if necessary, treated in areas with a polymer or natural stabilizer to harden the soil and provide wet weather passage and to ensure compliance with ADA guidelines. On the south side of the valley the trail will be located on State Park land at Gray Whale Cove State Beach and connect to an existing surfaced access road that heads west to an existing parking lot and trailhead serving visitors to Gray Whale Cove State Beach.

The County of San Mateo has served as the lead agency permitting the construction of the Devil's Slide tunnel and facilitating agency coordination in the planning and design of the public access improvements associated with the tunnel project. The County has agreed to assume ownership of the planned access improvements and to operate and maintain them until another agency such as the NPS assumes this role in the future for all or portions of the new trail system.

**Site Description:** The Devil's Slide area is located in northern San Mateo County approximately 10 miles north of Half Moon Bay and one mile south of the City of Pacifica near the northern terminus of the Santa Cruz Mountain Range (Ex 1). The roughly one mile section of Highway 1 to be converted to a new segment of the CCT when the tunnel opens in 2013 is one of the most spectacular segments of the California coast offering dramatic views from above steep cliffs that descend hundreds of feet to the ocean. Over the past several decades the highway has failed repeatedly, and over time the half-mile section infamously known as Devil's Slide has dropped 60 feet or more. Today this section of slide-prone roadway has drainage facilities, a pump system for dewatering the steep rocky slopes, chain link fencing, and concrete barriers that,

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together with the fencing, capture rocks that frequently fall from above. The concrete barrier on the ocean side also reduces the possibility of motorists driving off the steep cliffs. South of the Devil's Slide area, the highway continues past Gray Whale Cove and Montara State Beaches and McNee Ranch State Park to the town of Montara. The roadway passes numerous cuts, exposing the geologic formations, and fills placed to cross small creeks and gullies. There are several pull-out locations along the road for viewing the coastline and accessing the State Park beaches.

Green Valley is located immediately southeast of the tunnel project area and adjacent to Gray Whale Cove State Beach and McNee Ranch State Park. The entrance to the proposed trail corridor east of Highway One is bisected by staging and fill-disposal sites associated with the construction of the southern portals of the Devil's Slide tunnel, and a Caltrans tunnel operations facility. The valley consists of an alluvial fan draining a small creek, and is surrounded by steep, eroded slopes with natural gradients ranging between 30 to 70 percent. Soils within the valley are deep and moderately well drained along the creek channel. The surrounding mountain slopes support a dense vegetative cover of northern coastal scrub, dominated by coyote brush, while the valley is characterized by a dense riparian willow thicket and limited freshwater marsh. On the south side of the valley an existing surfaced access road extends roughly a half-mile from Highway One and the parking lot serving Gray Whale Cove State Beach to the back of the valley where a State Park employee housing complex is located. This access road will serve as the trail. Protected lands surround the upland sections of the trail corridor and valley, including several thousand acres that are expected to be eventually transferred to State Parks and/or the National Park Service.

**Project History:** As discussed above, the Devil's Slide CCT segment and access support facilities are being developed in conjunction with Caltrans Highway One Devil's Slide Tunnel Project. The tunnel will replace an historically unreliable section of the highway that has failed numerous times over the past 40 years due to landslides and other road failures. Since 2005 Conservancy staff has been coordinating with local, state and federal agencies to plan for the conversion of this highway section to recreational use and connect the new Green Valley trail to adjacent parkland located at both ends of the project area. A trail feasibility study prepared in 2006 with \$35,000 in Conservancy funding identified a preferred route to link the planned parking and trailhead improvements at the south end of the tunnel to existing State Park land (Exhibit 3).

### PROJECT FINANCING

#### Coastal Conservancy

<b>Devils Slide Coastal Trail Amenities</b>	<b>\$300,000</b>
<b>Green Valley Coastal Trail Planning</b>	<b><u>\$200,000</u></b>
<b>Total Project Costs</b>	<b>\$500,000</b>

The anticipated source for the Conservancy funds for this project is an appropriation from the Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006, Public Resources Code section 75001 *et seq.* ("Proposition 84"). Proposition

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84 authorizes the use of bond funds for projects that promote access to the coastal resources of the state and are consistent with the Conservancy's enabling legislation, Public Resources Code section 31000 *et seq.* (Pub. Resources Code § 75060(b)). Consistency of the project with the Conservancy's statutory mission is discussed below in "Consistency with Conservancy's Enabling Legislation." The proposed project will support access to a new segment of the California Coastal Trail and fund the preparation of final plans and permits to connect this trail to other park land nearby.

While no matching funds are available for the proposed project at this time, Caltrans estimates they will direct approximately \$10 million to construct the public access facilities at either end of the tunnel required under their coastal development permit. In addition, Caltrans has invested several million dollars to acquire land needed for the tunnel project, including lands in Green Valley where the proposed new Green Valley Trail would be constructed. The County of San Mateo expects to program more than one hundred thousand dollars annually to manage and maintain these Coastal Trail improvements.

### **CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:**

The proposed project is consistent with Chapter 9 of the Conservancy's enabling legislation: Division 21 of the Public Resources Code (Sections 31400-31410), regarding public access and enjoyment of coastal resources. Section 31400 states that the Conservancy have a principal role in the implementation of a system of public accessways to and along the state's coastline. Through the proposed action, the Conservancy will play a primary role by funding the development of an important link in the California Coastal Trail, a trail system of statewide significance.

Section 31400.1 allows the Conservancy to award grants to a public agency for development of accessways to and along the coast that serve more than local public needs. Consistent with this section, the proposed access improvements will support development of a new segment of the Coastal Trail that will attract visitors from throughout the San Francisco Bay Area and beyond. The nearby beaches and trails in the project area already attract more than 150,000 visitors per year from throughout the greater Bay Area, and when the section of Highway One at Devil's Slide is opened as a trail, the number of visitors to this area is projected to increase to 200,000 or more.

Section 31400.2 requires the Conservancy to consider a number of factors in determining the amount of funding for an access project. Consistent with this section, the proposed level of funding was evaluated relative to the total amount of funding available to the Conservancy for coastal access projects. Also consistent with this section, the fiscal resources of the applicant have been taken into account, and while the County of San Mateo has limited funds available for recreational trails, it has committed to provide the funds necessary to operate and manage the proposed new trails.

Section 31400.2 also stipulates the level of funding for an access project be determined by an application of factors prescribed by the Conservancy for the purpose of determining project eligibility and priority. Consistent with this requirement, and as discussed in greater detail in the section below, the project has been evaluated and found to be consistent with the Conservancy's project selection criteria and guidelines.

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Section 31400.3 enables the Conservancy to assist public agencies in developing and implementing a system of public accessways to and along the state's coastline. The proposed project will further these goals by improving and enhancing public access in a heavily-visited coastal region as part of a regional, comprehensive public access plan.

Consistent with Section 31408 requiring the Conservancy to coordinate development of the CCT in consultation with DPR, Coastal Commission (Commission), and Caltrans, Conservancy staff has worked with staff at Caltrans in planning for development of access facilities at the Devil's Slide tunnel area. Caltrans has also agreed to provide easement rights for the planned construction of the Green Valley Trail, pending permit approvals and CEQA review. Beginning in 2005, Conservancy staff has also participated in a multi-agency public access task force established for the Devil's Slide tunnel project coordinating with Caltrans, DPR, and the Commission in scoping the subject project.

### **CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ACCESS PROGRAM STANDARDS:**

The Devil's Slide Coastal Trail project is consistent with the Conservancy's Standards and Recommendations for Accessway Location and Development as follows:

**Standard No. 1, Protect Public and Coastal Resources:** The project will be designed and constructed to minimize alteration of natural landforms by utilizing existing abandoned or soon to be abandoned sections of Highway One and historic roadbeds. Preparation of final designs for the Green Valley Trail will evaluate opportunities to construct the trail with unsurfaced compacted earth that would be subordinate to the setting's character.

**Standard No. 5, Environmentally Sensitive Areas:** The conceptual plan for the Green Valley Trail avoids adverse impacts on the natural resources of the valley by placing it out of riparian areas to the fullest extent possible. The trail will cross a wetland at the back of the valley where the drainage and riparian canopy is the narrowest and will thus minimize impacts to existing woody vegetation. An elevated boardwalk will be installed at this crossing to minimize impacts to wetland and willow riparian woodland habitat.

**Standard No. 8, Trails:** The Green Valley Trail would link inland recreational facilities at McNee Ranch State Park to the shoreline at Gray Whale Cove State Beach, as well as to planned future NPS parkland at Rancho Corral de Tierra. The trail would avoid geologically unstable and erosive soils and prime agricultural soils. The trail would feature footbridges, appropriate paving materials, adequate trail drainage system, trash receptacles, and signs.

**Standard No. 12, Support Facilities:** The project includes purchase and installation of bathrooms, drinking fountains, directional and interpretative signs at both ends of the Devil's Slide tunnel trail. The Green Valley Trail will be served by the tunnel trail facilities located at the south tunnel portal and facilities at Gray Whale Cove State Park.

**Standard No. 13, Barrier-Free Access:** Consistent with this standard, both the Devil's Slide and Green Valley CCT segments will be improved to allow for barrier free access, as required by and consistent with all applicable federal and state statutes, regulations and guidelines governing barrier-free access for persons with disabilities.

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### **CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S 2007 STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):**

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines, last updated on June 4, 2009, in the following respects:

Consistent with **Goal 1 Objective B**, the project entails placing Coastal Trail signs on 1 mile of existing trail within public and private ownerships.

Consistent with **Goal 1 Objective C**, the project entails designing 1 mile of trail within public and private ownerships.

Consistent with **Goal 2 Objective C**, the project would serve to open a coastal area that is currently inaccessible or closed to public use while respecting the rights of nearby landowners and the need to minimize impacts on sensitive natural resources.

Consistent with **Goal 2 Objective E**, the project entails constructing new access facilities and enhances coastal recreational opportunities for residents and visitors.

### **CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA & GUIDELINES:**

#### **Required Criteria**

1. **Promotion of the Conservancy's statutory programs and purposes:** See the "Consistency with Conservancy's Enabling Legislation" section above.
2. **Consistency with purposes of the funding source:** See the "Project Financing" section above.
3. **Support of the public:** The project has broad support from a wide array of local, state and Federal agencies, environmental groups, and individuals. See support letters attached (Ex 4).
4. **Location:** The proposed project would be located within the coastal zone of San Mateo County.
5. **Need:** The County of San Mateo has limited funds available for planning and constructing recreational trails. Conservancy funds are needed for the access facilities Caltrans will not be installing at Devil's Slide tunnel segment and to prepare final trail plans and permits for the proposed Green Valley trail connection south of the tunnel area.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** The new Coastal Trail segment will attract visitors from throughout the Bay Area and beyond. Nearby State Park beaches and trails in the project area already attract more than 150,000 visitors per year and when the Devil's Slide trail is opened the number of visitors is projected to increase to 200,000 or more within five years.
7. **Sea level rise vulnerability:** The planned trail routes are 100 or more feet above sea level and will thus extend across areas well outside the elevations projected for sea level rise vulnerability.

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### **Additional Criteria**

1. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** Connecting Coastal Trail segments from the City of Pacifica to the tunnel area and south to State Park lands has been a Conservancy goal for more than a decade when funds were first provided to the City of Pacifica to acquire the Pedro Point Headlands property at the north tunnel portal area and to plan and construct trail segments there and at the south tunnel portal. Converting Highway One at Devil's Slide into a bicycle and pedestrian facility is identified as a priority in the Coastal Conservancy's "Completing the California Coastal Trail Report."
2. **Cooperation:** The project has entailed the cooperation of numerous local and state agencies, environmental groups, community leaders and private landowners.
3. **Minimization of greenhouse gas emissions:** The County will minimize greenhouse gas emissions by coordinating regular servicing/pumping of the vault bathrooms with the servicing of other similar County-maintained bathrooms located in the vicinity, including at the Pillar Point Bluffs Park. Preparing final plans and permit documents for the proposed Green Valley Trail will not result in increased emissions. The County intends to locate and design the trail to minimize construction-phase emissions by reconstructing existing trail where feasible using hand tools and other low emissions construction techniques and linking the trail to an existing access road. Some mechanized construction methods will be necessary, but will be kept to a minimum when clearing brush and widening, grading and leveling the trail. Conceptual plans recommend the trail surface be comprised largely of compacted earth from the site which would further reduce emissions from delivery and installation of base rock and other off-site materials.

### **CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES:**

The proposed project is consistent with the San Mateo County Local Coastal Program (LCP), which contains several public access policies that support the development of public access improvements at the Devil's Slide Tunnel area. LCP Policy 10.44 directs the County to "request the Coastal Conservancy to fund the improvement of high priority access trails and shoreline destinations of regional significance." Tables 10.5 and 10.6 titled, "Site Specific Recommendations for Shoreline Destinations" identifies the Devil's Slide area and Montara and Gray Whale Cove State Beaches as high priority for the development of public access trails and support facilities. LCP Policy 10.39 directs the County to "place signs in prominent locations along Route 1 and at the trailhead of each established access point." Conservancy funding for the proposed bathrooms, drinking fountains and signage will serve to implement these policies.

### **COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:**

The proposed purchase and installation of public access facilities including prefabricated bathrooms, drinking fountains and signage at the Devil's Slide Coastal Trail is categorically exempt from review under the California Environmental Quality Act pursuant to 14 California Code of Regulations section 15303 (New Construction or Conversion of Small Structures) which exempts "...construction and location of limited numbers of new, small facilities, or structures...". The proposed preparation of final

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plans and permit documents for the Green Valley Trail is statutorily exempt from review under the California Environmental Quality Act pursuant to 14 California Code of Regulations, section 15262, in that it would involve only planning studies and feasibility analyses for possible future actions. The planning and permitting portion of the project is also categorically exempt under Section 15306, which exempts basic data collection and resource evaluation activities. Environmental factors will be considered in the studies undertaken pursuant to this authorization.

Upon Conservancy approval of the project staff will file a Notice of Exemption for this project.